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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 000282

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STATE FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ARROYO KEEPS UP PRESSURE ON BURMA

REF: A. 2007 MANILA 3964

[1](#)B. 2007 MANILA 3875

[1](#)C. MANILA 3775 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's strong remarks on Burma at World Economic Forum meetings in Switzerland have kept the junta's behavior in the Philippine public spotlight, and a prominent Philippine opposition leader has publicly echoed her views. The Philippine press as well continues to report on the Burmese regime's ongoing crackdown on pro-democracy activists. Working-level Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) colleagues underscored the point that although the Philippine government remains resolute in its advocacy for democracy in Burma, ASEAN nations with closer ties to Burma may ultimately wield more leverage in effecting change. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Arroyo used the occasion of the high-level Davos session on "The Emerging Asian Community: Role of ASEAN" to warn once again that, absent the freeing of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Philippine Senate would not ratify the new ASEAN charter signed at the organization's November summit. President Arroyo said, "We must work together to make the tough choices to make ASEAN real and Aung San Suu Kyi free", later emphatically reasserting "we must see political reform; we must see Aung San Suu Kyi released -- and now."

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a rare display of accord with Arroyo, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel, a frequent Arroyo critic, also called publicly on the regime to release Aung San Suu Kyi and make moves toward democracy. Pimentel, the head of an informal congressional group focused on Burma, even demanded Burma's expulsion from ASEAN in the absence of concrete steps by the junta toward democracy. Pimentel's statements were widely reported in Philippine leading dailies; President Arroyo's strong remarks in Davos likewise received widespread coverage.

[1](#)4. (C) DFA Asia-Pacific Office Executive Secretary Hellen Barber underscored that her President's oft-repeated assertion that Philippine ratification of ASEAN's new charter was not possible without the release of detained democracy activist Suu Kyi reflected basic political reality, given the presence of an active Burma-focused caucus in the Philippine congress. She acknowledged that, given its minimal trade and contact with Burma, Philippines was less positioned to influence the regime than Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, which all have more substantial Burmese investments and other ties.
KENNEY